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Mayor Gonzales  
San Jose City Council Members

March 1, 2006

Re: South Coyote Greenbelt Strategy and Related Issues

Mayor Gonzales and Council Members,

The Sierra Club is pleased that the Council is focusing greater attention on the Coyote Valley planning process and related critical issues. The proposed South Coyote Greenbelt Strategy should focus on agricultural mitigation and recreational opportunities as the area is less appropriate for wetlands and wildlife mitigation. Therefore we would like to draw your attention to the need for a broader greenbelt strategy before the land in South Coyote Valley becomes an "acceptable" solution for all environmental impacts.

The development of Coyote Valley into a new neighborhood of San Jose will create a wide range of significant environmental impacts. Therefore it is important that discussions of a greenbelt strategy use the terminology appropriately thereby establishing an accurate context. Discussions and plans to protect a true greenbelt for Coyote Valley must include lands surrounding the valley. The current focus on the non-urban buffer as the "greenbelt strategy" misconstrues the extensive impact that development will create and the range of measures available to mitigate that impact.

Protection of the hillsides to the east and west of Coyote Valley must be part of a comprehensive greenbelt strategy. The valley is part of an ecosystem that is used by a diversity of animals that regularly move from the hillsides to the creeks to access the riparian habitat. In addition, the planning concept 'that development in Coyote Valley should be integrated with its environment' requires protection of the riparian corridors and their linkages to the hillsides for recreational and aesthetic reasons.

The Sierra Club requests you to commit to a comprehensive approach to greenbelt protection by directing staff to develop a strategy that begins at the ecosystem level. Greenbelts are comprised of agricultural, wilderness, habitat, watershed, and recreational lands. Protecting the connection between the hillsides and riparian corridors cannot be accomplished with the lands within the non-urban buffer. Furthermore, an ecosystem approach creates opportunities to address such challenges as protection and provision of water in Coyote Valley. Coyote and Fisher creeks can offer a low-cost and sustainable approach to groundwater recharge in addition to habitat and recreation. The current plan does not fully take advantage of this integrative and sustainable methodology.

Thank you for your concern for the environment,

Melissa Hippard  
Chapter Director

Cc: CVSP Task Force Members